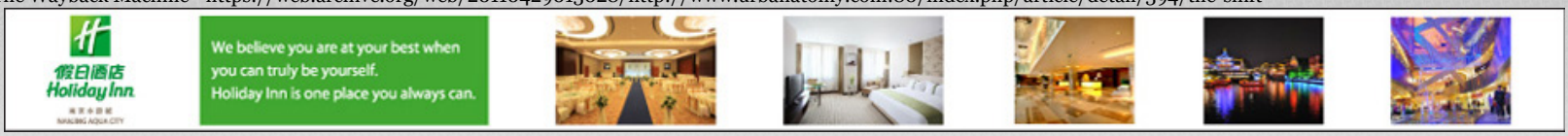
The Wayback Machine - https://web.archive.org/web/20110429013028/http://www.urbanatomy.com:80/index.php/article/detail/394/the-shift



The Shift

by nickland @ Tuesday, 26 April 2011 15:32

The future looks much less American than it did quite recently

"Prediction is difficult," Yogi Berra famously declared, "especially about the future." Extrapolation from historical trends is intellectually hazardous, leading not infrequently to embarrassment. Yet robust, deeply-rooted, and relentless tendencies – or 'secular' shifts – can be real and profound. One such is the hyperexponential growth of machine intelligence. Another is the rise of Asia.

For over 30 years, Chinese modernization has been the single greatest, and overwhelmingly significant, shaping factor in the order of the world. Twenty years of Indian economic opening and rapid growth have compounded the importance of the trend. Exponential, two-digit growth, with a doubling period of seven years or less, spells an expansion of over 16-fold in three decades. Such explosive development has consequences that are impossible to ignore.

Yet, despite a steady blizzard of journalism and popular literature on the subject, the sheer scale of this change sustains a capacity to shock. A recent IMF forecast that China's economy will be the largest in the world by 2016, when measured by domestic purchasing power (or purchasing power parity, PPP), has re-ignited commentary (for instance, here, and here). "This is more than a statistical story," says Brett Arends at Marketwatch. "It is the end of the Age of America."

It might seem strange to be surprised by a secular shift, but perhaps it shouldn't be. Intellectual recognition of an inevitable event is not always a perfect preparation for its occurrence, and, in this case, the accelerating speed of developments further undermines psychological adjustment. "Just 10 years ago, the U.S. economy was three times the size of China's," Arends reminds us.

The most important lesson is that mainstream modernization is relatively simple in broad outline. Any society that mixes vibrant markets with techno-scientific inventiveness will flourish. The combination of market-sensitive entrepreneurialism with technological innovation produces (continuous) industrial revolution, and that is the sole foundation of social success in the modern world.

ADVERTISEMENT
YCIS

Video
City Beat
City Beat

ADVERTISEMENT

Local Blogs
1 Schoolboys Cross-Dress For Girls'
2 Student slapped by teacher
3 Smart Car: Kobe Bryant Is "Big, In
4 Fool's gold: Why Youku is a sell
5 Chinese scientists discover way to

The specific role of cultural and institutional factors is debatable (and intensely debated), but the
alchemy of modernizing growth with the peculiar features of a particular society or civilization ca
arrogance, complacency, or resentful fatalism that stems from such misidentification becomes a

In the 19th century, China failed to disentangle the lessons of modernity from its own civilizationa
price of a lost century. In the 21st century, it is the West that needs to avoid confusing its moderr
irrelevant, and even toxic aspects of its particular cultural heritage. There is nothing essentially 'W
commercial competence. Falling prey to that confusion – from either side -- spells stagnation, at b

One thing Marxist materialism has certainly been correct about: every variety of soft and hard pov
industrial prowess. Industrial dominance, in the not very long term, is simply dominance, with im
leadership (or 'hegemony') that are in large part inescapable.

Arends sees this clearly:

"What the rise of China means for defense, and international affairs, has barely been touched on.
gigantic sums — from a beleaguered economy — to try to maintain its place in the sun.

"It's a lesson we could learn more cheaply from the sad story of the British, Spanish and other em
can't stay on top if your economy doesn't."

Decadence has consequences. Yes, that's probably unfashionable economic determinism – but it's

Comments

Leave a Comment

Submit

Urbanatomy Media Products

All Rights Reserved. Urbanatomy Media - Shanghai, Beijing & Pearl River Delta. China
沪ICP备08007913号